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Improving Land Use in National City

AUGUST 5, 2016 BY AT LARGE — LEAVE A COMMENT

By Adriana Covarrubias

National City is a rich, family-oriented community that is home to predominantly Chicano and



Latino families, some recent immigrants and some who have been living in the neighborhood for generations. We have a strong sense of connection and a collective responsibility to improve the quality of life in our neighborhood.

Unfortunately, outdated land-use policies have made National City a dumping ground for decades of industrial toxic pollution. Walking around National City, you will find auto body and car repair shops every other block, despite school zones and residential



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streets. Approximately 32,000 pounds of toxic air contaminants are released each year. Not surprisingly, asthma rates remain disproportionately high and there is a clear lack of green space and affordable housing.

Many of the challenges in National City trace back to poor land use planning, which is a leading cause of environmental inequities across California. Discriminatory land use practices have put the overwhelming majority of polluting industries in the backyards of the most disenfranchised, right next to our homes and schools. We've had enough. Low-income communities and communities of color like National City suffer from high levels of pollution, leading to higher rates of asthma and other respiratory diseases.

In National City, community leaders are taking a stand so that residents in our neighborhood have a voice in land-use decisions, which will help our families and children breathe easier.

Right now, the legislature is considering [SB 1000](#) by Senator Connie Leyva, a bill that will require cities and counties to have an environmental justice element, or environmental justice goals, policies and objectives, in their General Plans. A General Plan sets forth the vision and goals for a city's future. An environmental justice element provides an institutional mechanism to assist cities and counties in identifying and meeting the needs of the most vulnerable neighborhoods within its boundaries, which can also help it access public funding. Unfortunately, many cities fail to prioritize environmental justice and equity in land-use planning.

The powerful advocacy and organizing of residents in National City on the local and statewide level have ensured that our vision for equitable land use becomes a reality. For over 10 years, the Environmental Health Coalition has been working with local residents to develop, pass, and implement our neighborhood vision in partnership with the City that reflects our aspirations for a healthy community. The Westside Specific Plan, adopted in 2010, helps to ensure a vibrant, healthy community with affordable housing, public transportation, safe pedestrian walkways, compatible land uses and increased use of clean energy. This plan was a springboard for city-wide land use planning efforts. In 2011, National City became the first city in California to adopt a full Environmental Justice Element.

National City residents deserve to breathe clean air – just like families, friends and children in every other community – and SB

Raw Bits

“As Susan Faludi chronicled in her 1991 book ‘Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women,’ ‘The woman [Phyllis Schlafly] who opposed the ERA because it “would take away the marvelous legal rights of a woman to be a full-time wife and mother in the house supported by her husband” was a Harvard-educated lawyer, author of nine books, and a two-time congressional candidate.’ ”

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Thank you for an interesting analysis. Harris' and Sanchez'

1000 is the critical step we need to take to get there. We need to pass SB 1000 to ensure that all local governments will proactively plan for and address environmental justice concerns when developing long-term goals, policies, and visions for the growth of their cities. We have an environmental health crisis in our state and we can't afford to continue to make land-use decisions that harm our communities and our climate. When one community is made healthy and strong, the region as a whole becomes healthy and strong – and in turn, when one community is neglected, the entire region suffers and falls behind in the struggle for a healthier future in the face of climate change and industrial pollution.

Which will we choose?

Adriana Covarrubias is a resident of National City and a member of the Environmental Health Coalition.

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